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**Statement by Rep. Barbara Watson
Regarding Committee Action on HB 1355
Legislation to Prohibit Purchase of Firearms by Mentally Ill Persons**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- State Representative Barbara Watson (D-Miami Gardens) issued the following statement regarding today's House Criminal Justice Subcommittee vote in approval of House Bill 1355 regarding Purchase of Firearms by Mentally Ill Persons.

"I am encouraged by today's committee vote. The legislation that I have sponsored will enhance Florida's ability to keep persons with mental illnesses who are known to be a danger to themselves or others from purchasing firearms in Florida. I believe that House Bill 1355 will give needed protection, and I look forward to continued bipartisan support of this important initiative."

The following is additional background about HB 1355:

The specific problem that House Bill 1355 attempts to address deals with situations where people with mental illnesses who are a danger to self or others agree to a voluntary commitment for treatment to avoid an involuntary commitment proceeding, then quickly check themselves out of the mental health facility and have no record in the National Instant Check System (NICS) database to prohibit them from purchasing a firearm.

Under HB 1355, a person could be prohibited from purchasing a firearm if the examining physician finds the person imminently dangerous to himself or others and files a special certificate that if the person doesn't agree to voluntary commitment for treatment, an involuntary commitment petition will be filed.

At the time the person is diagnosed as dangerous, the person would receive written notice of the certification and agrees to accept voluntary commitment with a full understanding that he or she will be prohibited from purchasing a firearm or applying for a concealed weapons or firearms license or retaining one.

The bill would require speedy transmission of this information to the county court; if a judge approves the record for submission to the instant check system, it is sent along quickly to the FDLE for entry into NICS. Relief from the disability would be available through the existing statutory process.

If the person disagrees or feels strongly about not giving up his gun rights, the person can refuse to sign and the petition for involuntary commitment can move ahead.

Essentially, the bill language closes the gap in the Baker Act process and allows the state to put a prohibition on dangerous people who should be prohibited from having a firearm.

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